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ABSTRACT

Supervision is the application of knowledge, attitudes, and skills through human interaction to provide direction, support, or feedback. Supervision occurs in a specific situation, and, therefore, analysis of the situation may determine the skills and behaviors appropriate to that situation. Supervision is not accomplished through the application of a set of general supervisory behaviors, nor through the utilization of certain social processes to the exclusion of others. If sound theories of supervision are to be developed, specific supervisory situations should be examined and then generalized to logically fit all supervisory situations. Communication and human relations are the two most important elements in a model that was conceived to aid decision making. Use of the model forces the collection of data and the determination of needs in specific supervisory situations. (JD)

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SUPERVISION: A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL

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If practitioners and scholars today were asked what supervison is and how it should occur one would probably obtain a number of diverse answers. The purposes of this article are to describe the current state of supervision and to suggest a model which may be applied to supervision. Its applicability should enable practitioners and scholars alike to better develop viable concepts of supervision, supervisory roles, and supervisory practices, through examination of the relationship between the supervisory function and the supervising situation.

The Problem

Since the first conceptualization of supervision as a useful tool for the attainment of organizational goals, scholars and practitioners in education have attempted to apply these conceptualizations toward improving instruction. As a result of this continuous and persistent effort to find supervisory practices which lead to instructional improvement such approaches as democratic supervision, clinical supervision, creative supervision, and supportive supervision were designed and implemented. Each of these approaches provided a prescriptive set of instructions indicating how supervisors should behave.

Descriptive literature about educational supervision has provided the context for explaining what supervision is, where it takes place, and who does it. It has pointed out that educational supervision can take place in

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individual classrooms and administrator's offices, in post school day conferences, and during class hours; through group processes and individualized settings; and with respect to teacher behavior, curriculum development, and attainment and utilization of resources.

The descriptive literature has also provided us with insight about casting supervisors as teachers, evaluators, guides, counselors, subject matter specialists, curriculum directors and professional leaders. Some educators believe that supervision is the major responsibility of certain individuals assigned to job defined supervisory roles. Others take the broader view that supervision is job related, but that a variety of individuals may function in differing supervisory capacities in varing supervisory situations. Pedagogists suggest that supervision is a separate field of study which encompasses a specific body of knowledge while others argue that supervisors must draw their knowledge, expertise, and practices from other fields of endeavor, such as counseling, psychology, and related social sciences.

Scholars have attempted to build theories of supervision around identified supervisory responsibilities, around analyzed organizational goals, and through specific types of social processes. The tasks involved in supervision have been stated and restated. Supervisory styles and climates are also frequently discussed. With the advent of competency-based instruction, lists of supervisory competencies have been compiled and programs have been developed for helping one attain those competencies.

From recent analysis of supervisory textbooks and literature, and from discussions with educational supervisory practitioners, it is reasonable to assume that our knowledge and practices of supervision may be no further advanced today than in 1961 when J. Minor Gwynn in Theory and Practice of Supervison, stated, "There is disagreement among both

professional educators and the public as to what supervision is today." In general, it appears that most of us are still prone to describe supervision from our own particularistic frame of reference.

While one can only speculate, several reasons for such disparity seem plausible. First, specific supervisory responsibilities are frequently ill defined by employers for practitioners in the field. Second, supervisors frequently function without any rational conceptual framework of supervision. Thus, teachers, administrators and supervisors may have little or no common ground for perceiving supervision. Third, the study of supervision has tended to become fragmented, focusing upon supervision in industry, government, or education, and often upon singular elements of supervision within organizations, such as evaluation or guidance. Fourth, college instructors have frequently treated supervision as a unique body of knowledge and have ignored its close ties to related fields. Practitioners often have come away with views of many theories, concepts and practices, but not unifying elements which provide for a holistic view of what supervision is and how it may occur. Finally, scholars have too frequently neglected to identify assumptions when developing notions about supervision, and have too readily generalized about effective supervisory behavior without recognition of the many situational variables inherent in each supervising situation.

A Supervision Model

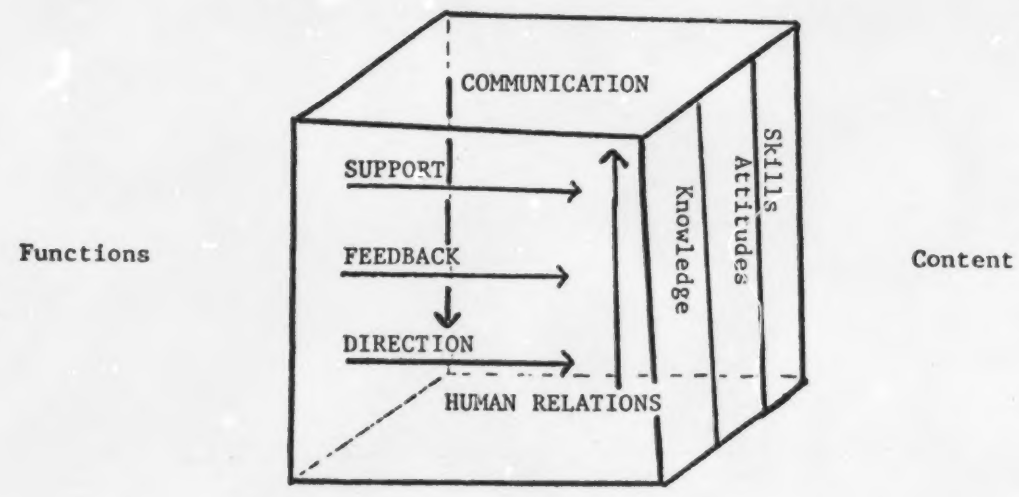
The model that follows was initially conceived in conjunction with an analysis of the appropriateness of tasks which college supervisors and classroom cooperating teachers perform in the supervision of student

teachers in Georgia. It was more fully developed in planning for a workshop to prepare cooperating teachers for their supervisory responsibilities, where it served as a focus for the development of instructional modules. While the model has been applied in practice only to this type of supervision, it is suggested that the model may be useful in examining any supervisory situation, if the generic definition of supervision as "looking after" is used.

Several assumptions were made in the development of the model:

1. Supervision is essentially a means for attaining pre-conceived goals.
2. Supervision occurs through human interaction.
3. Supervision is appropriately viewed as being situationally specific, i.e., it occurs at a specific time and place and includes as variables all those elements perceived by the individuals within the situation.
4. Behaviors derived from knowledge, attitudes and skills can be used by a supervisor in a particular supervising situation.

PROCESSES



A Supervision Model

In the previous model, human relations and communications are viewed as the processes within which supervision occurs through interaction with others. They are the most critical elements in the model. The quality of human relations and the clarity of communications within the supervising situation will largely determine the effectiveness of supervision. While these processes will not be extensively addressed here, it should be understood that the quality and degree of these elements relate specifically to the situation in which the supervision is occurring. The quality of human relations may be more important to an instructional supervisor in schools than to the shop foreman on the assembly line. Conversely, the clarity of communication may be of greater importance to the foreman than the human relations aspect of supervision.

This view of supervision also suggests that all supervision is characterized by three major functions. Further, that any supervisory behavior may be related to the functions of direction, support and feedback, and occur through the use of human relations and communication processes. Direction is seen as including all those supervisory acts which communicate objectives or goals, and means for their attainment, to the one(s) being supervised. Support consists of those supervisory acts which provide material resources and psychological encouragement to the supervisee(s) toward the attainment of goals. Feedback entails data about the supervisee(s) performance in respect to personal and organizational goal attainment. Included would be observation and evaluation of behavior and product, and communication about these to the supervisee(s).

Adjunct to each of the five primary elements in the model are components of knowledge, attitudes and skills. These components comprise the content area of the processes and functions. While the knowledge, attitudes and

skills necessary to effective human relations and communications are considered common to all modes of human interaction, their quality in supervisory situations may relate directly to the effectiveness of the supervision.

Providing direction, support and feedback in supervisiory situations will require particular knowledge, attitudes and skills related to the specific situation, and may also call for an emphasis of one function over another. Thus it can be seen that an instructional supervisor, a mother supervising her children on a playground, and a military sargeant may use similiar modes of communication and human relations (with recognizable variations of quality) but each may use differing knowledge, attitudes and skills in providing direction, support and feedback to those whom they are supervising. Further, in a training situation the sergeant might emphasize direction, while emphasizing support during battle conditions. Similarly, the instructional supervisor might stress direction at one time, feedback when working with a teacher through observation and evaluation, and some measure of support in most supervisory situations. Variations in the emphasis upon each of these functions would probably also occur with the mother supervising her children at play.

It would appear that in continuing supervisory situations the degree of emphasis placed upon each of the three supervisory functions might relate directly to the experience of the supervisee and to the sophistication of the activity being supervised. A novice may require more direction, an experienced person only support and feedback. Some persons have a psychological need for more feedback and support than others.

The utility of the model which has been presented lies in its applicability to all types of supervisory situations, whether it is

instructional supervision, business office supervision, military supervision, or supervision that occurs in teaching, coaching, or in industry. It can be applied to supervision across organizations, with groups of individuals, or can be used on a one-to-one basis. The model synthesizes much of the collective knowledge that has been gathered about supervision and supervisory functions and provides a useful schema for analyzing sypervisory situations; the necessary first step for appropriately determining how supervision should occur.

Practical Application

Models are intriguing to develop and build. While they are helpful in organizing thoughts and conceptualizations, they are most useful if they have practical value. The model discussed herein suggests that the appropriateness of a supervisory behavior relates directly to the specific conditions of the supervisory situation. It implies that supervision is situatuionally specific and that analysis must be made of the supervisory situation. The main value of the model may be that it recognizes the significane of decision making in the supervisory process. Use of the model forces the collection of data relative to specific supervisory situations. From this data decisions can be made about the who, what and how of supervision.

It is suggested that the practitioner might use the model in examining supervision in relation to specific organizational goals, the determination of supervisory practices appropriate to a particular situation, and in the development of preparation programs for supervisors through raising a series of questions similiar to those that follow:

1. Why is supervision needed in a specific situation?

2. Who or what is to be supervised?

3. Is supervision necessary to the organizational or management goals? Which goals?

4. What are the situational variables involved, are there new personnel or are they all experienced?

5. What are the other situational variables to be considered (available resources, individual development, organizational structure)?

Having obtained the above information, the following additional questions should be answered:

1. Which functions of supervision are to be emphasized; direction, support or feedback?

2. At which point in the overall process should each be emphasized?

3. How is each to be emphasized?

4. Who is to be responsible for each supervisory function? Would peer supervision be most effective, should an administrator handle particular portions of supervision or should a specialist be utilized?

5. How should the supervision take place: with groups of individuals or on a one to one basis, through conferences or in conjunction with analysis of job performance or self evaluations?

From the analysis of the answers to questions similar to those above, what specific skills, attitudes and knowledge would one need to have in order to implement appropriate supervisory practices in the specific situation? How can one determine whether or not an individual has these qualities and in fact, can apply them to the supervisory situation? Which of them can be attained through supervisory experience and which require specialized preparation. Using the model in this manner should enable those interested in supervision to determine the needs of specific supervisory situations, and to make sound decisions relative to how supervision will occur.

Summary

What is supervision? How does it occur? We would suggest that supervision is the applicaiton of knowledge, attitudes and skills through human interaction processes in providing direction, support or feedback to a supervisee. Supervision occurs in a specific situation and, therefore, analysis of the situation may determine supervisory skills, attitudes, knowledge and behaviors appropriate to that situation. Supervision is not accomplished through the application of a set of general supervisory behaviors. Nor is supervision accomplished through the utilization of certain social processes, to the exclusion of others. Supervision can be autocratic or democratic.

If we are to develop sound theories of supervision we need to begin with the examination of specific supervisory situations and then generalize to concepts which logically fit all supervisory situations. If we are to develop realistic supervisory practices we should recognize that decisions must be based upon analysis of specific supervisory situations.